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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSUL 000005

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NINEWA CHALDO/ASSYRIANS CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR FUTURE IN IRAQ

CLASSIFIED BY: H. Carl Gettinger, Team Leader, Provincial Reconstruction Team Ninewa, State.
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C). REO Poloff met with members of the Beth Nahrain Patriotic Union (BNPU), a Chaldo/Assyrian political party, on January 31, to discuss national election results, security issues, and the future of the community in Ninewa. BNPU member Yacoub Ibrahim said kidnappings and extortions against the community have increased dramatically in recent weeks and he sees a connection between current church bombings in Baghdad and Kirkuk with the situation in Ninewa. BNPU members said they have "no faith" in local institutions, such as the provincial government and police, to help them because of corruption. Aziz Gorgis believes incidents such as these, coupled with the lack of jobs and educational opportunities, force many Chaldo/Assyrians to "flee the country." BNPU members claim a history of persecution, and since the party did not win a seat in the national election they believe they have "no voice" in the new government. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

2. (SBU) REO Poloff met with members of Beth Nahrain Patriotic Union (BNPU), a Chaldo/Assyrian political party, in Mosul on January 31. In attendance were Dinkha Patros Hirmis, Yacoub Ibrahim, and Aziz Emanuel Gorgis.

INCREASE IN CRIMES AGAINST THE COMMUNITY

3. (C) According to BNPU members, Assyrians in Mosul and outlying Christian villages have been hit hard recently by a rash of kidnappings and extortions. BNPU believes the events are most likely not a result of sectarian violence but rather politically motivated. They claim a connection between recent church bombings in Kirkuk and Baghdad with events in Ninewa. Over the past 15 days, Ibrahim claims extortions have increased dramatically. He offered a list of recent kidnappings, all for economic reasons, where the victims were told to pay a ransom ranging from 35,000 to 100,000 dollars, family members paid the ransoms, and the person was released. Ibrahim also noted that several garage shop owners in the Hay Al-Sinaa and Hay Al-Shorta industrial neighborhoods of Mosul have been threatened as well and told to pay thousands of dollars in bribes or be kidnapped and/or have their businesses bombed. Ibrahim contends that it is not only Christians who are being targeted in Mosul in these cases, but other groups as well. He claims, however, that the majority of those affected are Assyrians.

4. (C) Hirmis said no one would come forward with knowledge of the perpetrators because they do not want to suffer from further reprisals and put their families in harms way. And unfortunately, however, "nobody knows who the kidnappers are," said Hirmis. Ibrahim submitted copies of letters, written in Arabic and left on the front doors of random households in Bashiqa and Bartalla villages, from an unnamed group claiming those responsible for the crimes are "Jews."

A HISTORY OF PERSECUTION

5. (C) Gorgis claims the events are not new, and both he and Hirmis believe recent kidnappings are part of an historical movement by their larger and stronger Arab and Kurd neighbors to control them. Hirmis said the Chaldo/Assyrian community has always been neglected. He said "no one" spoke out against the massacres of 1915 and 1933 where thousands of Chaldo/Assyrians were killed. Gorgis claims harassment and other acts of terrorism against the community have occurred over the past few years, worsening every two months or so before improving. Ibrahim coldly said, "our community did not ask for the [USG] to invade our country." But he believes that since "the fall of Saddam Hussein" the Chaldo/Assyrian community has been hardest hit because "Arabs and Kurds" believe the Christians "support

the [USG]." Ibrahim said the Christian community "welcomed democracy," but that now since they were "written out of the constitution" and did not win a seat in the new national assembly, the community is "quiet" and losing faith in the democratic process.

NO FAITH IN LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

16. (C) Members of BNPU said they do not have faith in local government or the police because they view these institutions as the "root of the problem," according to Hirmis. Although they said they are not averse to speaking directly to the provincial chief of police (PCOP), Wathiq Al-Qadir, Ibrahim claims involving "good men" such as Wathiq would only "get him killed like former governor Kashmoula," who was assassinated in 2004. Further, they believe the middle and lower ranks of the Iraqi Police (IP) are "working with insurgents," and speaking to them directly would put the community at risk. Poloff urged the group to consider talking with the PCOP to help the community and allow the police to do its job to protect the citizens. BNPU members agreed to submit specific cases of extortion and kidnapping, as well as copies of harassment letters, to the PCOP for investigation. Hirmis said the Christian community has little faith in the church since they believe church officials are "paid off" by the Kurds. And infighting within the Chaldo/Assyrian political realm is complicated as well, since the community could not unify in time for the national election. As a result, there were three Christian coalitions, and smelling defeat many other candidates joined Kurdish or Arab coalitions for their own advantage.

MASS EXODUS

17. (C) Part of the community's problems, said Hirmis, is that "too many Christians are leaving" the country. He believes harassment and the lack of work and educational opportunities force many to "flee to neighboring countries," as well as to "Europe, Australia and the U.S." And as more and more people leave the fewer numbers they have to build a community that could help change their condition in Iraq. Ibrahim sees the situation as hopeless. He does not believe that committee chair for minority issues in the national assembly, Dr. Haneen Al-Qaddo (a Shabek from Ninewa), could help much either. Gorgis believes Al-Qaddo has "little ability" to help his own people, so "how is he supposed to take care of us?"

COMMENT

18. (C) Since the December national election, members of the Al Nahrain National List (#752) have sunk deeper into despair because they were not able to win a seat in the new government. Unfortunately, they are also losing faith in the democratic process as a way to help address their concerns. They also do not yet see the merits of working through non-Christian representatives, the media, and the Chaldo/Assyrian community abroad to help them. Rather, they watch scores of Christians leaving the country for economic and political security and fall further into hopelessness. As we have reported in the past, the dynamic is one of a minority, such as the Chaldo/Assyrians, caught in the middle between the larger and stronger Arabs and Kurds. And the Christian community's fear of being absorbed by these two groups is very real. Although BNPU blames the USG directly and indirectly for their plight, they still hold faith that the USG can help find solutions to their problems. The REO will continue to nudge them along and encourage them to work with Iraqi government institutions to address their issues and invest in their communities.

GETTINGER